

Hd. Qrs. Petersburg, 9 Feb. '65

Mr. President

I have today in the obedience to orders issued from the Adj. Insp. Genl's office, entered upon the duties of the office of Genl. in chief. I know I am indebted entirely to your indulgence & kind consideration for this honorable position. I must beg you to continue these same feelings to me in the future & allow me to refer to you at all times for council & advice. I can not otherwise hope to be of service to you or the country. If I can relieve you of a portion of the constant labour & anxiety which now presses upon you & maintain a harmonious action between the great armies. I shall be more than compensated for the addition to my present burden. I must, however, rely upon the several commanders for the conduct of the military operations with which they are charged, & hold them responsible. In the event of their neglect or failure, I must ask for their removal. As it necessary to bring every man back to the ranks that we can, I beg leave to submit for your approval the following proposition. To allow me to proclaim by your authority a pardon to all deserters & absentees who will return to their regts or compys. within thirty days from the date of its publication at the Hd. Qrs. of the Mil. Depts. with the assurance that this will be the last act of amnesty extended for such offenses & with the promise that hereafter all such offenders will receive the full sentence of the courts upon their conviction, without [suspension (?) or remission (?)] or delay, from which there need be no appeal for clemency. I propose to except from this act of forgiveness those who having been once pardoned have repeated the offense & all those who have entered the service of the enemy. All who may desert after the publication of the order shall receive quick & merited punishment. This may be of some service & do some good. It is the only method that I can propose to cause the return of our absentees, & perhaps if done at this time when we may expect a reaction of public sentiment, the people at home may force them out. The reason why I think it better to issue such an order under my name & by your authority is that you have before proclaimed a pardon, should you repeat it, many might hereafter persuade themselves that it would again be offered them & be again tempted to desert. I would go up to consult with you in person on this & other matters, but I do not feel at liberty to leave at this time. May I request you to give me an early answer to this proposition, as there is no time to be lost.

With great respect, your Obt. Servt.

R E Lee

Genl

His Exclly. Jefferson Davis

Pres. C. States Richmond